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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000312

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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENTS WILL RECALL NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY  
MAY 15

DUBLIN 00000312 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: DCM JONATHAN BENTON FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D

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SUMMARY AND COMMENT  
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1. (C) On March 23, Michael Collins, the Taoiseach's senior foreign affairs advisor, briefed Ambassador Kenny on next steps in the peace process, and thanked the President for a productive Saint Patrick's Day. He said that the Taoiseach and PM Blair plan to issue a joint statement April 6 in Armagh, Northern Ireland, in which they will say that they are recalling the Northern Ireland Assembly on May 15. According to Collins, the proposals they will make seek to meet some of the concerns of DUP and Sinn Fein while adhering to the Good Friday Agreement. The May date is designed to meet Sinn Fein's desire to have the Assembly up and running before the marching season begins; the proposal to give the Assembly a second chance in November to elect an executive if they fail to do so in May is a sop to the DUP, which has wanted a longer "probationary" period for Sinn Fein before entering government with it. The prime ministers also will suggest that they will dissolve the assembly and launch "Plan B" if the parties fail to elect an executive by the end of November. Collins said that USG help is needed to push parties to participate. The two governments are aware that DUP might refuse to take its seats and that Sinn Fein might consider "Plan B" a better option, in which HMG and GOI would take over decisionmaking. Collins also asked if the USG could help organize an investment conference for Northern Ireland, which would complement the political initiative and give parties hope. End Summary

2.(C) Comment: The two governments are sincere in their desire to get the assembly up and running in 2006. Both rightly worry about the effect on the ground of a long stalemate and both have their own political positions in mind, with elections in Ireland in 2007 and continuing discussion of the length of Blair's tenure. These factors galvanize the governments, and they might indeed follow through this time. However, both governments have a tendency of backing down when the parties object to their plans. Irish papers already carry stories that nationalists are not crazy about the plan. Similarly, as colleagues in Belfast have reported, Ian Paisley and his DUP are showing no desire to govern with the nationalists and seem to be trying to wait out Blair. We would agree with the governments that a prolonged stalemate is untenable, especially after the IRA's historic decommissioning and indications that loyalist paramilitaries are considering laying down their arms. The hard men need to see that politics is delivering them something and that they were right to lay down arms. The USG can be helpful in shoring up the governments, should they

waver; in working with Sinn Fein and DUP to give this new plan a chance; and in supporting an economic conference. Like us, the Irish, are concerned about the on-again, off-again, nature of the UK's attempts to organize a conference, and share our belief that the conference must be cross-border and all-island in order to succeed. End Comment.

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Recalling the Northern Ireland Assembly  
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13. (C) The draft statement the prime ministers plan to issue April 6 opens by noting that this is a "momentous stage" in the history of Northern Ireland, now that the IRA has decommissioned and the IMC has assessed that the IRA "no longer represents a terrorist threat." It then sets out a timetable and practical framework for moving forward in order to build trust and avoid the dangers of a political vacuum. The governments would recall the Northern Ireland assembly on May 15 for a period of six weeks, ask them to elect a first and second minister as soon as possible and to allocate prospective ministerial posts under the d'Hondt formula within seven days of its first meeting. The governments are not optimistic that the assembly will succeed in doing this in six weeks and so are building in a "second chance." After the summer recess, they would allow the assembly another 12 weeks to form an executive.

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Plan B  
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14. (C) The governments plan to say that if an executive is not formed by the end of November, they will defer restoration of all of the institutions, cancel elections to the assembly and cancel salaries and allowances of MLAs. The governments would then aggressively implement all other areas of the agreement, including North-South and East-West

DUBLIN 00000312 002.2 OF 002

arrangements, policing, human rights, and equality and victims' issues. Essentially the threat of Plan B is that the Northern Ireland parties would lose the chance to govern themselves for now and would see Ireland playing a much bigger role in decisions. Plan B is thus designed primarily to jolt DUP. Currently, the governments think DUP believes that its refusal to govern with Sinn Fein maintains the status quo and DUP likes the status quo. The governments want to show DUP that they actually have much to lose if they continue in their obstinance. The danger is that Sinn Fein has always seen the chance to govern in Northern Ireland as a stepping stone to the larger goal of a united Ireland. They could see Plan B as a good option because it increases Ireland's role, contributes to the "greening" of the whole island, and frees them to focus their efforts on increasing their power in the Republic.

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U.S. Role  
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15. (C) Collins asked the ambassador if the U.S. would help encourage the parties to give the initiative a chance. He is concerned that, despite the governments' efforts to come up with a plan that takes into account some concerns of each party, the parties will focus on what they do not like and not give the plan a chance. He also asked whether the USG could jump start the long-discussed economic conference for Northern Ireland. Amb Kenny suggested the U.S. host an organizational meeting with representatives of the three governments, to be followed by a second organizational meeting with parties. The ultimate goal would be an economic conference in the autumn. Collins thought this approach would be very helpful. He talked about the economic need in Northern Ireland and the positive effect an economic conference could have on the political situation. Sinn

Fein/IRA and the loyalists all need to see some hope on the horizon. There is grumbling in the nationalist community because some feel that their act of decommissioning did not deliver the political progress they had expected. Among loyalist paramilitaries considering disarming, there is concern about high unemployment rates among poor protestants. They, too, are most likely to give politics a chance if they see benefits on the ground.

KENNY